

VZCZCXRO4765
PP RUEHBC RUEHKUK RUEHROV
DE RUEHRH #0071 0121437
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P 121437Z JAN 09
FM AMEMBASSY RIYADH
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9803
RUCPDOC/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC PRIORITY
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 4844
RUEHKL/AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR 0057
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH 9972
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 4346
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

UNCLAS RIYADH 000071

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EEB, NEA/ARP, AND NEA/IPA
COMMERCE FOR ITA AND BIS/OFFICE OF ANTIBOYCOTT COMPLIANCE
TREASURY FOR OFFICE OF THE GENERAL COUNSEL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: ETRD EINV ECON EFIN KWBG KBCT KPAL SA IS
SUBJECT: GRASSROOTS BOYCOTT OF AMERICAN GOODS GAINING
TRACTION

REF: RIYADH 17

Key Points

¶1. (SBU) -- A grassroots campaign to boycott U.S. goods and franchises, with the notable exception of automobiles and hotels, is gaining ground in the Kingdom.

-- This campaign is bolstered by endorsements from local and foreign Islamic scholars.

-- Comment: This campaign is broader than similar attempts in 2002 and 2006, but it is unclear how many will participate. We do not believe it will have a long-term impact on U.S. - Saudi bilateral trade.

-- These efforts seem to be an embryonic attempt at mass organization through the use of modern technologies. End key points and comment.

Boycott targeting American brands and franchises

¶2. (U) One effort to encourage Arabs and Muslims to boycott American and Israeli goods, called 'Gaza is burning - put out the flames with a boycott', is spreading through text messages (SMS messages), e-mails, paper fliers, popular blogs, and by word of mouth at mosques. One common SMS message reads, "Please boycott US/Israeli products. Make it a habit, not a short-term response." Lists of specific brands and franchises to target are being circulated by e-mail and include Burger King, McDonalds, Pizza Hut, CocaCola, Kraft, Kelloggs, and numerous fashion and household product brands. A notable omission from the list given their popularity in the Kingdom are U.S. automobile brands such as Ford and Chevrolet, and hotels such as the Marriott.

Background on Islamic scholars supporting boycott

¶3. (SBU) The recent Saudi Gazette article cites Dr. Yousuf Al Qaradawi, a prominent Egyptian Islamic scholar currently at the University of Qatar, as calling for the boycott. Qaradawi recently generated some controversy in the media when he issued a fatwa stating it is acceptable for Muslims to consume small quantities of alcohol. He has been accused in the past of condoning the killing of American civilians in

Iraq, although he denies these allegations; but he has been outspoken in support of suicide bombings against Israeli soldiers and civilians. In 2004, Qaradawi issued a fatwa supporting the boycott of American goods, stating, "American goods, exactly like 'Israeli' goods, are forbidden. It is also forbidden to advertise these goods."

¶4. (SBU) Dr. Nasser Al Omar, a Saudi radical fundamentalist scholar, was identified by the Emirati blog Al Saha as another proponent of this boycott. Omar is a member of the Bin Khaled tribe in Buraidah and teaches at Al Imam Mohamed bin Saud Islamic University. He was one of 26 Saudi clerics to sign a 2004 fatwa saying Iraqis should rise up and oppose the U.S. presence in Iraq. He also strongly opposed our efforts to revise fundamentalist school text books in Saudi Arabia. Omar first called for a boycott of American goods in 2002, saying such a boycott was "a virtue, not an obligation."

FRAKER